

FREE ISSUE

PREVIEW DYING LIGHT 2 STAY HUMAN

PREVIEW SAINTS ROW



ISSUE 81 JANUARY 2022

Walmart Gamecenter

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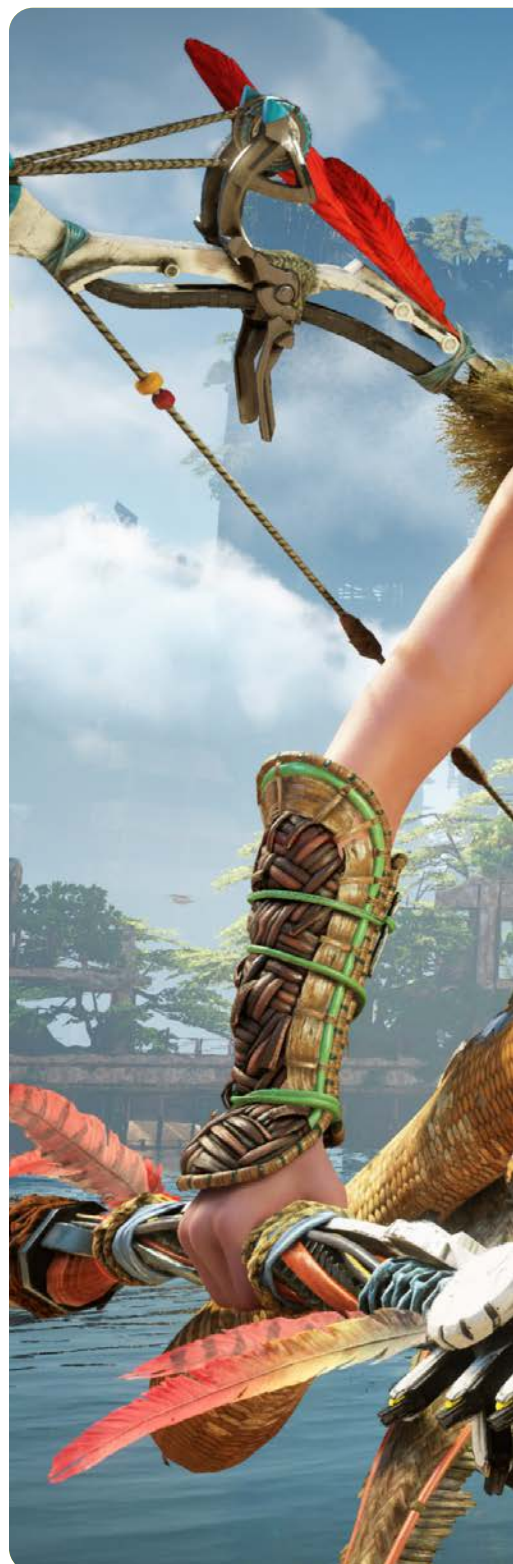
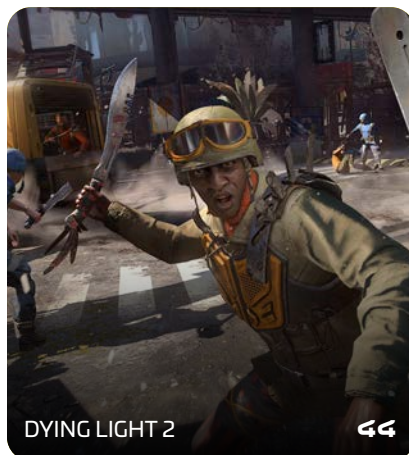
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FROM THE EDITORS



BETTER LATE THAN SORRY

Just like that, another phenomenal year of gaming has gone by. It feels like just yesterday that those of us on the *Walmart Gamecenter* crew were planning our first issue of 2021, looking forward to all the excellent games the next 12 months had in store. Now, we're at the other end of the calendar, having played nearly all of our most anticipated titles. Some, like last month's cover game, *Halo Infinite*, are still a few weeks away as we're writing this, offering an emphatic finale to a packed fall gaming season. Quite a few other games we were looking forward to, however, have been delayed into 2022.

Yes, it's easy to get bummed when a game hits later than we initially expected. Who likes waiting? But in the grand scheme of things, our impatience stacks up pretty small against other considerations, like all-losing games to live up to their full potential and ensuring developers don't have to pull all-nighters to make unreasonable deadlines. Nintendo legend Shigeru Miyamoto said it best: "A delayed game is eventually good. A bad game is bad forever."

Plus, delays in 2021 have just made 2022 that much more exciting. Every fall is usually packed with great games, but this winter is, if anything, shaping up to be equally great. Two of the games featured in this very issue launch in the same month—February—and they're far from the only heavy hitters arriving then.

First up is our cover game, *Horizon Forbidden West*. This sequel to 2017's *Horizon Zero Dawn* sees hero Aloy travel to a new region of her post-post-apocalyptic world, discovering new secrets and doing battle with strange robotic creatures. We can't wait to see what developer Guerrilla Games delivers, especially in the gorgeous-looking PlayStation 5 version of the game.

The other February game we're previewing is *Dying Light 2 Stay Human*. In Techland's post-apocalyptic sequel, players will parkour and battle their way through a zombie-filled city where the only thing more dangerous than the undead is the dark side of human nature.

We also have a look at *Saints Row*, a reboot in which players will create their own wannabe gangster and try to build a criminal empire in the sprawling desert city of San Ilse. Fittingly, *Saints Row* was almost a February game, too, until publisher Deep Silver decided to delay it a few months to add further polish.

This issue also features a holiday gift guide, in case you're racking your brain to come up with last-minute ideas. Starting on page 22, you'll find two dozen accessories, collectibles, movies, books, and more to spoil the special people in your life who love games as much as you do (or perhaps to just spoil yourself).

As we leave 2021 behind and kick off 2022, be sure to keep reading *Walmart Gamecenter*, the magazine that keeps you at the center of all things gaming.

Josh Harmon and Mollie L Patterson

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Walmart
Gamecenter
january 2022

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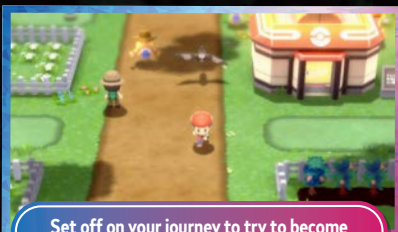
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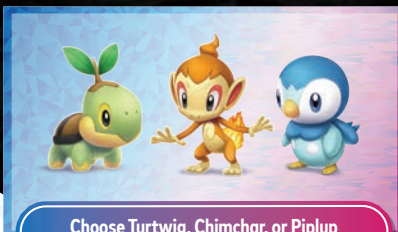
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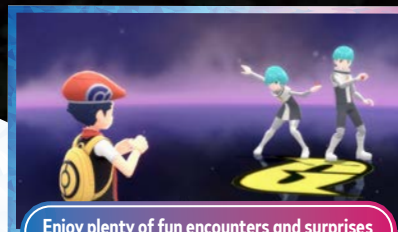
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Nintendo





INDUSTRY VETERANS HELP SHAPE NEW PROJECTS

Across her career, award-winning writer and director Amy Hennig has helped bring to life a number of groundbreaking games, from the beloved *Soul Reaver* series to PlayStation powerhouse franchise *Uncharted*.

Now, Hennig is looking to use her talents on something a little more Marvel-ous. Her current studio, Skydance New Media, has entered a partnership with Marvel Entertainment to develop a “narrative-driven, blockbuster action-adventure game, featuring a completely original story and take on the Marvel Universe.”

“It’s an honor to be able to tell an original story with all the humanity, complexity, and humor that makes Marvel characters so enduring....”

AWARD-WINNING WRITER AND DIRECTOR AMY HENNIG

We don’t yet know which piece of that universe the game will focus on specifically, but Hennig explained in the announcement that “it’s an honor to be able to tell an original story with all the humanity, complexity, and humor that makes Marvel characters so enduring and to enable our players to embody these heroes that they love.”

While Hennig is working with Electronic Arts veteran Julian Beak at Skydance Media’s fledgling interactive division, another well-known name in the industry, Marcus Lehto, is joining EA to help the company open a new studio in Seattle, Washington.

The team will focus on first-person gaming experiences, which should come as no surprise given Lehto is the co-creator of and a former artist on the *Halo* series. Previous to joining EA, he served as president and game director for V1 Interactive, which developed *Disintegration*, a game that mixed first-person shooting and real-time strategy elements.

Now, like EA’s other first-person shooter studios, Lehto will report to Respawn founder Vince Zampella—who definitely knows a thing or two about the genre.

If you’re curious to check out the previous works of either Hennig or Lehto, such as the *Uncharted* or *Halo* franchises, head over to Walmart.com or your local Walmart store to pick up your copy of *Uncharted: The Nathan Drake Collection* or *Halo: The Master Chief Collection*.

HOW DIGITAL DOWNLOAD WORKS

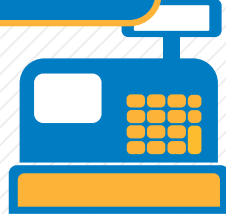
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4. Redeem

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DEC

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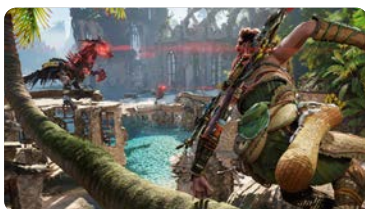
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STUDIOS SPEAK UP ABOUT
A QUIET PLACE GAME

World War Z developer Saber Interactive, studios ilLOGIKA and EPITOME, and Paramount Pictures are coming together to craft "a new single-player, story-driven horror adventure video game" based on the *A Quiet Place* film franchise.

A QUIET PLACE

"The *A Quiet Place* video game will let fans experience the tension of the films with a level of immersion they've never felt before," said Hervé Sliwa, creative director at ilLOGIKA, as part of the game's announcement. "We're excited to work with EPITOME and to team up with Saber

Interactive to share this unique vision of hope and horror with players everywhere in the future."

While no solid details have been released for the game just yet, the concept of the movies—in which monsters with extremely sensitive hearing have forced what's left of humanity to live in near-total silence—does present some obvious parallels. Sound-based stealth has a long history in games, including recent hits like *The Last of Us Part II* and *Death Stranding*. There's plenty of precedent for the most obvious approach to adapting *A Quiet Place*.

To find out all of your options for games already available that provide for tense gaming sessions, check out Walmart.com or your local Walmart store.

FANTASY AND FUTURE COLLIDE IN
STAR OCEAN'S NEXT CHAPTER

With recent releases like *Tales of Arise* and upcoming titles such as *Final Fantasy XVI*, a number of classic Japanese RPG franchises are getting upgraded and refreshed for a new generation of players.

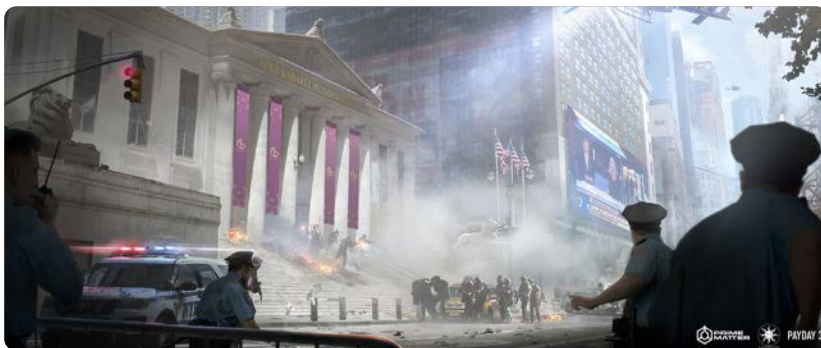
Now, it might be developer tri-Ace's turn to join that trend. Together with publisher Square Enix, the duo recently revealed *Star Ocean: The Divine Force*, the first new major chapter in the long-running series since 2016's *Star Ocean: Integrity and Faithlessness*.

Speaking of duos, *The Divine Force* brings back the idea of dual protagonists, allowing players to pick between sci-fi starship captain Raymond and fantasy-themed warrior princess Laetitia. The game's story will be a blend of the past and the future, as people from two very different backgrounds must come together to save the universe.

Star Ocean: The Divine Force promises an adventure filled with diverse characters, fast-action battles, and wondrous alien worlds to explore when it



hits Xbox Series X/S, PlayStation 5, Xbox One, and PlayStation 4 in 2022. To pre-order *The Divine Force*, or check out the other great JRPGs out there, visit Walmart.com or your local Walmart store.



GET THE GANG BACK TOGETHER IN PAYDAY 3

During a recent livestream to celebrate the original game's 10-year anniversary, *Payday 3* game director Erik Wonnevi revealed more about the much-anticipated upcoming third chapter of the series.

"*Payday 2* ended with the gang being retired," Wonnevi explained during the livestream. "*Payday 3* takes place some years after that, when the gang are pulled back into a life of crime, not wholly by their own choice."

That gang in *Payday 3*, by the way, is Dallas, Hoxton, Chains, and Wolf—as in, the original four main characters from *Payday: The Heist*. Each returns with an updated character design centered around new outfits that both help unite the quartet as a team and also showcase each member's individuality.

In addition to having made powerful enemies that force them out of retirement, another story element to *Payday 3* is the worldwide fame the four men have achieved. Their exploits made them globally infamous, and their disappearance from the scene left many wondering what had happened.



"Them suddenly coming back is most definitely going to make a lot of noise [in *Payday 3*]," Wonnevi continued. "It's big news."

That idea plays into *Payday 3*'s modern setting, as the gang now find themselves in the digital age. Software giants, cryptocurrencies, mass surveillance, the dark web, and more are factors that could come into play in the heists the team plans out. But helping them will be a whole host of digital gadgetry that could only exist in the modern era.

And, while there's no limit to where the gang can or might go, Wonnevi noted that *Payday 3* kicks off in the Big Apple. With the team's goal to shift the game into larger-scale urban settings, New York seemed a perfect place to "immerse players into this fantasy of being at the heart of a living and breathing city environment."

Sadly, we're still a ways off from getting a first look at the game itself, as *Payday 3* isn't set for release on consoles and PC until 2023. In the meantime, there are plenty of other great cooperative multiplayer games waiting for you on Walmart.com or at your local Walmart store.

CELEBRITY GAMING NEWS ROUNDUP

Timothée Chalamet is no stranger to appearing on our screens, having played roles in films such as *Interstellar* and *Call Me by Your Name*. However, during a recent press tour for his latest movie *Dune*, Chalamet was shocked to see himself on TV in a different form: as a new *Fortnite* player skin based on his character Paul Atreides.

Through that same press tour, another of Chalamet's connections to gaming came to light. After an investigator discovered his secret while working with a reporter, Chalamet admitted to having hosted a short-lived YouTube channel where he made custom Xbox controllers for money. His total profits? \$30.



No doubt pulling in a bit more money from his video game-related efforts is Dr. Dre, who is said to be in the studio recording original music for the next *Grand Theft Auto*. The person saying that? His old pal Snoop Dogg, when he was a guest on the *Rolling Stone Music Now* podcast.

Not shockingly, Rockstar Games refused to comment to *Rolling Stone* on anything to do with a new *GTA*, but Snoop promised that Dre is working on some "great freaking music," though those might not have been his exact words.

5 to play





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HALO INFINITE

PUBLISHER XBOX GAME STUDIOS / DEVELOPER 343 INDUSTRIES / PLATFORMS XBOX SERIES X/S, XBOX ONE, PC / RELEASE DATE 12.08.2021

Both a spiritual reboot and a sequel to *Halo 5: Guardians*, *Halo Infinite* once again places Master Chief front and center in a new adventure. With his former AI sidekick Cortana having gone rogue, Chief travels to Zeta Halo to seek out The Weapon—the one AI that didn't fall under Cortana's spell—only to find that a dangerous Covenant splinter group known as the Banished have set up shop and will stop at nothing to destroy those who stand in their way. Set in a vast open world for the first time in franchise history, *Halo Infinite's* campaign is both a nod to the past and a look to the future. Sporting new and upgraded weapons, a grappling hook, and any vehicle he can get his hands on, Master Chief must infiltrate Banished outposts and take down the group's leader, Escharum. When you get tired of fighting the Banished, you can head into multiplayer to discover new maps and new game-play mechanics.

Set in a vast open world for the first time in franchise history, *Halo Infinite's* campaign is both a nod to the past and a look to the future.

5 to play



2

* PREORDER

POKÉMON LEGENDS: ARCEUS

PUBLISHER NINTENDO / DEVELOPER GAME FREAK / PLATFORMS SWITCH / RELEASE DATE 01.28.2022

Set in the distant past of the same region as 2006's *Pokémon Diamond* and *Pokémon Pearl* (aka this year's *Pokémon Brilliant Diamond* and *Pokémon Shining Pearl*), *Pokémon Legends: Arceus* lets players venture forth from Jubilife Village for excursions into the large, open maps of different areas—a bit like Capcom's *Monster Hunter* series. Except that instead of using massive swords, this game's heroes use Pokémon in battle. Catching them all might be tough, since some of the game's monsters, dubbed Alpha Pokémon, are bigger than normal, while others can only be found in certain parts of the world. More importantly, and for the first time in this series, players can be hurt by Pokémon. And not just by Alphas, either. Good thing you not only have your wits, but also a Celestica flute, which can summon three Pokémon you can ride, making it easier to get away.

Pokémon Legends: Arceus lets players venture forth from Jubilife Village for excursions into the large, open maps of different areas.



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GRAND THEFT AUTO: THE TRILOGY – THE DEFINITIVE EDITION

PUBLISHER ROCKSTAR GAMES / DEVELOPER GROVE STREET GAMES, ROCKSTAR NORTH / PLATFORMS XBOX SERIES X/S, SWITCH, XBOX ONE, PS4 / RELEASE DATE 12.07.2021

If a game developer can have one of its games define a generation, that's considered a success. For Rockstar Games, crafting interactive entertainment that shapes the future of gaming has been a regular occurrence. Now, three of those titles—*Grand Theft Auto III*, *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, and *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*—are being enhanced and upgraded for a whole new generation of gamers (and consoles). Across the trilogy, *The Definitive Edition* brings gameplay enhancements such as improved weapon targeting, updated weapon and radio station interface wheels, and more useful minimaps. Of course, each game also benefits from improved audio and visuals, including a “completely rebuilt” lighting system, better weather and shadow effects, higher-resolution textures, and upgraded character and vehicle models. No matter if it'd be your first or hundredth time playing them, *Grand Theft Auto: The Trilogy – The Definitive Edition* promises to be a great way to experience three video games that forever changed the industry.

Across the trilogy, *The Definitive Edition* brings gameplay enhancements such as improved weapon targeting, updated weapon and radio station interface wheels, and more useful minimaps.



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Produced by
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Nintendo Switch Lite plays all games that support handheld mode.

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TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX EXTRACTION

PUBLISHER UBISOFT / DEVELOPER UBISOFT MONTRÉAL / PLATFORMS XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5, XBOX ONE, PS4, PC / RELEASE DATE 01.20.2022

Much like William Shatner, the *Rainbow Six* series is going into *spaaaaace*! Well, sort of. It's more like space is coming to *Rainbow Six*, since this spin-off of *Rainbow Six Siege* has you using your tactical and strategic skills to take out people infected with an alien parasite. Good thing you're a member of the Rainbow Exogenous Analysis & Containment Team, who are specially trained to deal with errant alien invaders. Playable solo or co-op, this first-person shooter has you infiltrating (and hopefully clearing out) containment zones with rather varied levels of E.T. infestation. Except unlike their cousins in *Back 4 Blood*, these intergalactic parasites are sentient, situationally aware, and smarter than your average zombie. And they're evolving. Just be careful; unlike in some co-op games, you can actually leave someone behind in this sci-fi shooter. Good thing it also supports cross-play—you're going to need all the help you can get.

Playable solo or co-op, this first-person shooter has you infiltrating (and hopefully clearing out) containment zones with rather varied levels of E.T. infestation.



EVOLUTION 2

OUT NOW



XBOX PS4 PS5 UNIVERSAL FRONTIER

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DANGANRONPA DECADENCE

PUBLISHER SPIKE CHUNSOFT / DEVELOPER SPIKE CHUNSOFT / PLATFORMS SWITCH / RELEASE DATE 12.03.2021

When Spike Chunsoft's *Danganronpa: Trigger Happy Havoc* finally made its way West, PlayStation Vita owners were treated to a thrilling and demented tale of 15 unwilling participants forced to play a deadly game by the sadistic (yet huggable) Monokuma. The cult classic spawned two equally engrossing sequels, *Danganronpa 2: Goodbye Despair* and *Danganronpa V3: Killing Harmony*, which now all come to the Nintendo Switch for the first time ever in special Anniversary Editions. Even for those who have already played through all three main games, *Danganronpa Decadence* includes a fourth offering: *Danganronpa S: Ultimate Summer Camp*, an all-new "boardgame-style bonus game" that brings together the franchise's characters in a (hopefully) more light-hearted island romp. If you're looking for a gripping gaming trilogy or are just enamored by a certain cephalopod-related Netflix series, give *Danganronpa Decadence* a go—and succumb to ultimate despair.

The cult classic spawned two equally engrossing sequels... which now all come to the Nintendo Switch for the first time ever in special Anniversary Editions.



5

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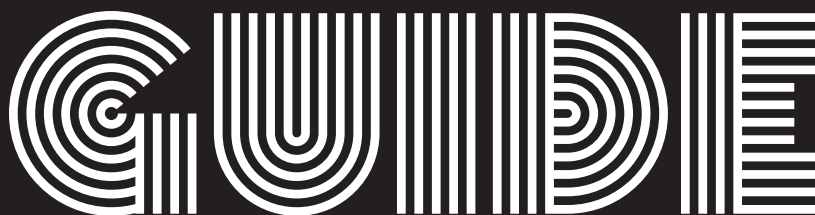


Game and systems sold separately. Nintendo Switch Lite plays all games that support handheld mode.
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SPOIL THE GAMERS IN YOUR LIFE—OR YOURSELF



DUALSENSE CHARGING STATION FOR PLAYSTATION 5

When sitting down with your PlayStation 5 to play the latest hits or those timeless classics, the last thing you want to worry about is how much battery life is left on your controllers. With Sony's DualSense Charging Station, recharging your DualSense controllers after an intense gaming session is only a click away. With its own power supply, you can position the Charging Station wherever is most convenient for you—and it has no trouble quickly charging two controllers at once.



DUALSENSE COSMIC RED WIRELESS CONTROLLER FOR PLAYSTATION 5

With the PlayStation 5, Sony has given us the DualSense Wireless Controller, a new generation of input device that offers game-altering features such as immersive haptic feedback, dynamic adaptive triggers, refined analog sticks, and a built-in microphone. But, who says that gaming has to be so black and white? If you want to give your PS5 a bit of extra flair, consider the DualSense Cosmic Red, a color variation for the console's controller that one could say is out of this world.

NINTENDO SWITCH PRO CONTROLLER

While one of the conveniences of the Nintendo Switch is that its Joy-Cons can be removed and connected to a Joy-Con Grip

to work as a full controller when playing on a television, you may want something a bit more advanced. The Nintendo Switch Pro Controller offers everything you could want in a wireless Switch controller, including motion controls, HD rumble, amiibo support, and a built-in rechargeable battery.



MICROSOFT XBOX ELITE WIRELESS CONTROLLER SERIES 2

For those who want to take their gaming to the next level, the Xbox Elite Wireless Controller Series 2 offers far more game-enhancing features than any standard controller. With adjustable-tension thumbsticks, shorter hair-trigger locks, extensive button customization options, swappable thumbsticks and D-pads, and four programmable back paddles, the Xbox Elite Wireless Controller Series 2 can be personalized to fit the needs of any player, no matter their favorite games or genres.

XBOX RECHARGEABLE BATTERY + USB-C CABLE FOR XBOX SERIES X/S

The Xbox Rechargeable Battery + USB-C Cable set is a great option for those who don't want to constantly swap AA batteries on their Xbox controllers. Once snapped in, it can easily be recharged by simply plugging the controller into your Xbox's USB port, lasting for up to 30 hours after less than four hours of charge.





SANDISK 128 GB MICROSDXC MEMORY CARD FOR NINTENDO SWITCH

Even with the bump in internal memory on the Nintendo Switch – OLED Model, you're still going to want more storage space to get the most out of your Switch, no matter which version you own. One solution is SanDisk's line of microSDXC memory cards released under an official license from Nintendo. Store more digital games, back up more saves, and take more screenshots and videos to save those precious gaming memories without fear of quickly running out of space. And, best of all, do it all on a tiny memory card embossed with classic Nintendo iconography.



WD_BLACK 500GB D30 GAME DRIVE SSD FOR PLAYSTATION 5 AND XBOX SERIES X/S

If the cost of directly upgrading the storage in your PlayStation 5 or Xbox Series X/S is too much at the moment, then a solution like the WD_Black 500GB D30 Game Drive SSD might just be the thing for you. Use it to back up those PS5 or Xbox Series X/S games you aren't playing until you're ready for them again, or copy over last-generation PlayStation 4 or Xbox One titles and play them directly from the drive. And, thanks to the speed and power of the D30's SSD, those older games will benefit from better performance and shorter load times.



PAC-MAN 12-IN-1 LEGACY EDITION ARCADE1UP CABINET

The folks at Arcade1Up have made a name for themselves when it comes to bringing the arcade experience home, and one of their latest and greatest offerings is the *Pac-Man* 12-in-1 Legacy Edition. Packing all of the fun of an arcade cabinet into a smaller, more affordable package perfect for playing at home, the *Pac-Man* 12-in-1 Legacy Edition features one of history's most beloved quarter (and dot) munchers, *Pac-Man*, along with eleven other classic arcade releases: *Pac-Land*, *Pac-Man Plus*, *Super Pac-Man*, *Pac & Pal*, *Pac-Mania*, *Galaxian*, *Galaga*, *Dig Dug*, *Dig Dug II*, *Mappy*, and *Rompers*.



SEAGATE STORAGE EXPANSION CARD FOR XBOX SERIES X/S

The new consoles have brought us video games that are prettier, more technically complex, and more exciting than anything we've ever seen before. However, they're also something else: bigger in file size. With the Seagate Storage Expansion Card for the Xbox Series X/S, you'll be able to download or install far more games at once, all on a small device that easily plugs into the back of your console. And, for any games stored directly on the Expansion Card, you can take them with you to another Xbox Series X/S in a different room of your house—or to a totally different house.

HALO 6.5" THE SPARTAN COLLECTION MASTER CHIEF ACTION FIGURE

With the upcoming release of *Halo Infinite*, Master Chief is back and ready for action—both on our television screens and in our hands. The Halo 6.5" The Spartan Collection Master Chief action figure is a high-quality, fully articulated action figure that lets kids (or kids at heart) re-create their favorite scenes from *Halo*, or dream up epic new crossover adventures with other toys. And, even better, Master Chief comes with a special voucher for in-game content in *Halo Infinite*.





LEGO SUPER MARIO: LUIGI STARTER COURSE

This set in LEGO's *Super Mario* line finally gives Luigi his turn in the limelight. Like previous sets, the Luigi Starter Course lets you build a blocky level and guide Luigi through it to earn virtual coins. The figurine features LCD screens for eyes and a speaker, and can be paired with a smart device app to enable interactive features. If you also have a Mario figure, the Bros. can team up to earn bonus coins. Just don't argue over who's *really* Player Two.

LEGO SUPER MARIO: BOWSER'S AIRSHIP EXPANSION SET

Bowser's propeller-powered flying ship has become an iconic setting in the *Super Mario* games since it first appeared in *Super Mario Bros. 3*, and now you can build it in LEGO form. In addition to the ship itself—which measures in at over a foot long when fully extended—the set also comes with new enemies, including Kamek and a Goomba sporting a pirate hat. You'll need a Mario or Luigi Starter Course set to take full advantage of the interactive elements.



LEGO MINECRAFT: THE RUINED PORTAL

LEGO has put out some amazing *Minecraft* sets, but this might be one of the best yet for serious players. This build allows hero Steve to travel through a portal into the Nether, the game's fiery and dangerous alternate dimension. The portal actually opens and closes using a switch, and once LEGO Steve crosses through he'll find a Wither Skeleton to do battle against. Don't worry, though, as Steve gets a Netherite Sword and Diamond Pickaxe to help him face the challenges ahead.

LEGO MINECRAFT: THE JUNGLE ABOMINATION

Inspired by last year's dungeon-crawler spin-off *Minecraft Dungeons*, The Jungle Abomination playset allows builders to reenact the memorable final boss battle from the *Jungle Awakens* DLC. The Abomination itself is appropriately intimidating, with fully posable limbs, head, mouth, and waist. What's more, it has backup in the form of an enchanted Creeper, a Skeleton, and Iron Golem.

Our two adventurers will also have to watch out for the deadly Poison Quill Vine, lying in wait for anyone who gets too close. But if the heroes can triumph, they'll get access to a treasure chest full of loot.





INSIDE THE WORLD OF ROBLOX

Inside the World of Roblox is a travel guide to the world's largest gaming and entertainment platform. This book has everything you need to get the most out of *Roblox*, including interviews with members of the community, the coolest items in the *Roblox* Catalog, and experiences that you need to check out. You might even discover some behind-the-scenes secrets from the people at *Roblox* HQ. This book is the gift that keeps on giving for *Roblox* players.

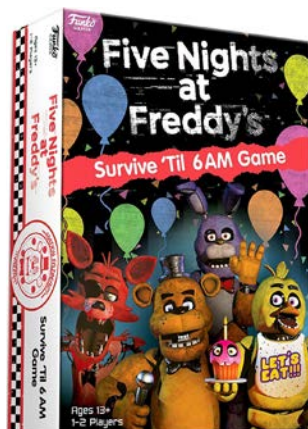
FIVE NIGHTS AT FREDDY'S - SURVIVE 'TIL 6AM BOARD GAME

The infamous and long-running horror game franchise is now a board game! As the night shift security guard at Freddy Fazbear's Pizza, you'll take turns doing the usual *Five Nights at Freddy's* shtick: checking cameras, managing the lights, and trying not to get murdered by Freddy and the rest of his killer animatronic friends. Survive into the morning and you can clock out safely! (At least, for now.) One or two players can scare themselves silly.



PRESS RESET: RUIN AND RECOVERY IN THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

Journalist and best-selling author Jason Schreier is back with another investigative look at what goes down behind closed doors at video game development studios. This time, Schreier investigates why some of the industry's most celebrated studios shut down—and what the people who worked at them did next. Tales of hostile takeovers and abusive bosses are just the tip of the iceberg.



THE GAME OF LIFE SUPER MARIO EDITION

The classic board game has received a *Super Mario*-themed twist for the ultimate game night entertainment. Instead of starting a family and advancing your career, you'll play as Mario, Luigi, Peach, or Yoshi and work your way across the Mushroom Kingdom to defeat Bowser. Collect coins and use them to buy power-ups, items, and companions that will help you along your journey. Along the way, you'll engage in fun side activities and play minigames such as Rock Paper Scissors, Thumb Wars, and Spin-Offs against other players. *Super Mario* fans will appreciate the art and player pieces.



THE ULTIMATE HISTORY OF VIDEO GAMES VOL 2

Picking up where the last volume left off, Steven L. Kent's exploration of the origins of modern gaming is a must-read for anyone who's interested in the history of their favorite hobby. As Sony, Nintendo, and Sega were all betting on their own visions of gaming's future, a fourth contestant was about to enter the ring: Microsoft. Read about the origins of Xbox, Nintendo's big bet on the Wii, and the rise of franchises like *Grand Theft Auto* and *Halo* in this riveting recap.



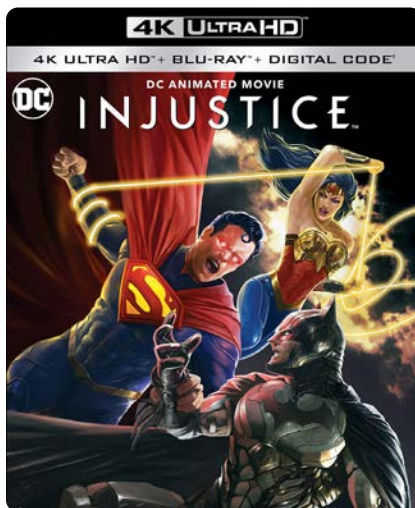
POKÉMON 25TH ANNIVERSARY DELUXE PIN COLLECTION

In addition to video games, mobile games, anime, and movies, *Pokémon* is also known for its trading card game. This year marks the *Pokémon* TCG's 25th anniversary, and to celebrate, The Pokémon Company has released an exclusive Deluxe Pin Collection. This box set includes a foil promo card featuring Zacian LV.X, four *Pokémon* TCG: Celebrations booster packs, two more TCG booster packs, and a beautiful enamel pin that features Flying and Surfing Pikachu. Catch this collection while you can!



MONSTER HUNTER 4K UHD BLU-RAY

Capcom's long-running series about wielding gigantic swords to take down even more gigantic monsters is now a live-action Hollywood movie. Starring Milla Jovovich (*Resident Evil*) as U.S. Army Ranger Capt. Natalie Artemis, *Monster Hunter* tells the story of a UN military force that falls through an interdimensional rift into a desert world that's home to massive beasts. The team's only hope for returning home rests in the hands of a skilled warrior (world-famous martial artist Tony Jaa) who calls this strange planet home. Also starring rapper T.I. and Ron Perlman (*Hellboy*), *Monster Hunter* has all the action and excitement of the famed video game series.



INJUSTICE 4K UHD BLU-RAY

This adaptation of the NetherRealm Studios fighting game series brings the story of a vengeful Superman to life as a DC animated movie. When the Joker tricks Superman into decimating Metropolis and killing the woman he loves, the Man of Steel takes matters into his own hands and forms a totalitarian regime to ensure that a tragedy of this magnitude never happens again. This doesn't sit too well with Batman, and the Caped Crusader forms a splinter group composed of other superheroes, including fellow Justice League members, to fight back against Superman's dictatorial reign. Starring Kevin Pollak, Anson Mount, Justin Hartley, and Gillian Jacobs.



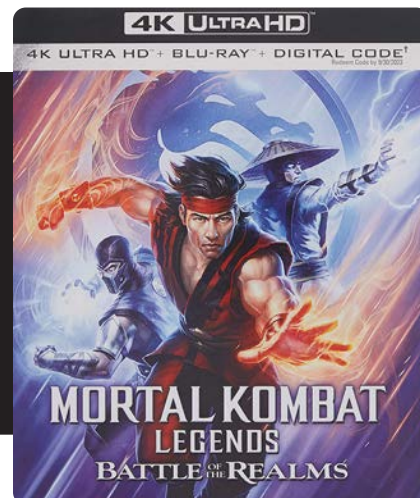
FREE GUY 4K UHD BLU-RAY

What would you do if you found out that the life you were living was a lie, and that you were actually a character in a video game? And what if you then found out that you weren't the star of the game, but just a lousy, dispensable background NPC? That's what happens to an average banker named Guy (Ryan Reynolds) when he encounters an attractive felon (Jodie Comer). This newfound realization gives Guy full autonomy to play the game as he wishes, which makes him a hit with players and streamers like Ninja, but a target of the game's designer (Taika Waititi).

MORTAL KOMBAT LEGENDS: BATTLE OF THE REALMS 4K UHD BLU-RAY

The animated legends continue in *Mortal Kombat Legends: Battle of the Realms*. Liu Kang, Raiden, Johnny Cage, Sonya Blade, and Jax Briggs return home from the first Mortal Kombat tournament to

discover that Shao Khan's Outworld forces have invaded Earthrealm. It's up to these warriors to compete in another Mortal Kombat tournament to avoid an all-out war with Outworld and fight for the fate of Earthrealm. Fans of the storied video game franchise will get a kick out of seeing the series' most popular characters like Sub-Zero and Kung Lao duke it out in kinetic and detailed 2D animation.



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*Terms and exclusions apply. Game catalog varies over time, by region, and by device. See xbox.com/gamepass and ea.com/ea-play/terms and ea.com/ea-play/for-details. Xbox Cloud Gaming (Beta): streaming limits apply. Requires compatible controller (sold separately) and FPO supported device; see system requirements.



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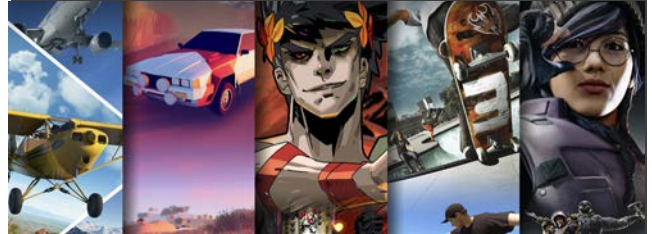
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*Game catalog varies over time. See xbox.com/gamepass

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Hard shell case protects Nintendo Switch™ or Nintendo Switch™ OLED

Model System and features adjustable viewing stand. Recessed bottom insert firmly holds either Nintendo Switch™ or Nintendo Switch™ OLED Model with or without Joy-Con™ GoPlay Action Grips

GoPlay Action Grips for comfortable game play
Nintendo Switch™ Screen Protector

Game Card and Micro SD Card Cases

Nintendo Switch™ Cleaning Cloth



NNS82

NINTENDO SWITCH™ - OLED MODEL

Meet the newest member of the Nintendo Switch family. The new system features a vibrant 7-inch OLED screen with vivid colors and sharp contrast. The Nintendo Switch – OLED Model also includes a wide adjustable stand for more comfortable viewing angles, a dock with a wired LAN port for TV mode (LAN cable sold separately), 64GB of internal storage, and enhanced audio in Handheld and Tabletop modes using the system's speakers.

*There may be software where the game experience may differ due to the new capabilities of the system, such as the larger screen size.



NINTENDO SWITCH™ - NEON BLUE/RED

Nintendo Switch is the hybrid home video game system from Nintendo. In addition to providing single and multiplayer thrills at home, the Nintendo Switch system can be taken on the go so players can enjoy a full home console experience anytime, anywhere. The mobility of a handheld is now added to the power of a home gaming system, with unprecedented new play styles brought to life by the two new Joy-Con controllers.



cover story

* PREORDER

HORIZON FORBIDDEN WEST

GO WEST

BY JOSH HARMON

FACT FILE

PUBLISHER
SONY INTERACTIVE
ENTERTAINMENT
DEVELOPER
GUERRILLA GAMES
PLATFORMS
PS5, PS4
RELEASE DATE
02.18.2022



Of all the games Sony's first-party studios crafted for PlayStation 4, just one has so far managed to kickstart an entirely new, big-budget franchise. Many of the great titles on that platform, like *God of War* and *Marvel's Spider-Man*, were sequels within ongoing series or adaptations of existing properties. Others, like *Ghost of Tsushima* and *Death Stranding*, remain standalone games—at least for now.

Horizon Zero Dawn stands as the lone exception. Critics and players alike fell in love with its richly textured world. Post-apocalyptic settings are a dime a dozen in games, but *Zero Dawn* managed to put a genuinely fresh spin on the idea. Yes, this was an Earth in the wake of a global

Aloy has cemented herself as one of the most memorable gaming heroes in recent years.

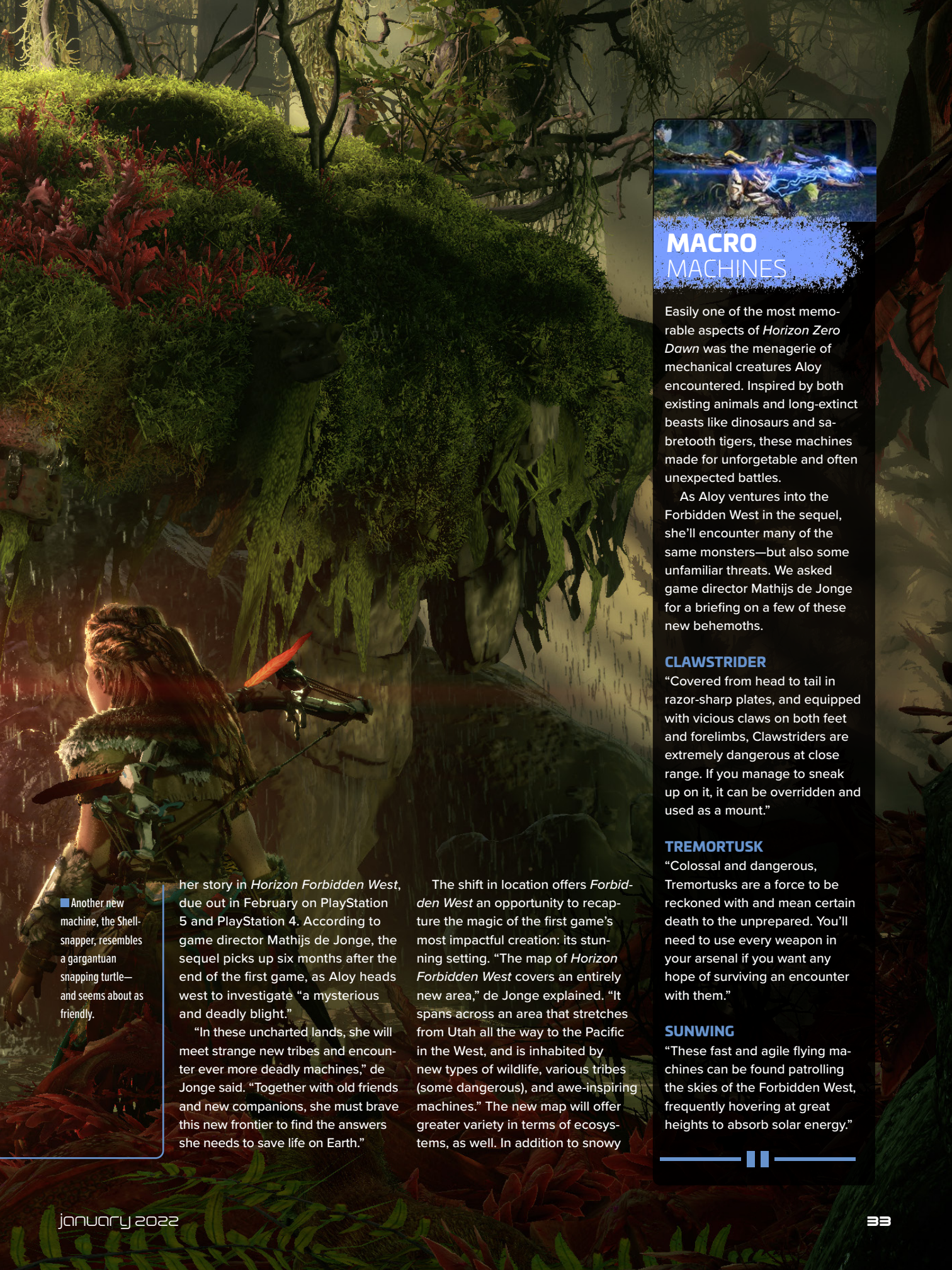
catastrophe, but so much time had elapsed that nature had long since reclaimed all but a handful of ruins. Rather than drab, brown, and bleak, the world felt brimming with life—and danger, in the form of bandits and imaginatively designed mechanical creatures inspired by ancient wildlife.

What's more, the game's protagonist, Aloy, wasn't some dour survivor mourning the world she'd lost, but a machine hunter getting by in the only world she'd ever known, a place inhabited by diverse tribes, full of mysterious pasts and hidden destinies. By the end, Aloy had cemented herself as one of the most memorable gaming heroes in recent years.

It's no wonder, then, that Sony and Guerrilla Games will continue

"In these uncharted lands, [Aloy] will meet strange new tribes and encounter ever more deadly machines."

GAME DIRECTOR MATHIJS DE JONGE



MACRO MACHINES

Easily one of the most memorable aspects of *Horizon Zero Dawn* was the menagerie of mechanical creatures Aloy encountered. Inspired by both existing animals and long-extinct beasts like dinosaurs and sabretooth tigers, these machines made for unforgettable and often unexpected battles.

As Aloy ventures into the Forbidden West in the sequel, she'll encounter many of the same monsters—but also some unfamiliar threats. We asked game director Mathijs de Jonge for a briefing on a few of these new behemoths.

CLAWSTRIDER

"Covered from head to tail in razor-sharp plates, and equipped with vicious claws on both feet and forelimbs, Clawstriders are extremely dangerous at close range. If you manage to sneak up on it, it can be overridden and used as a mount."

TREMORTUSK

"Colossal and dangerous, Tremortusks are a force to be reckoned with and mean certain death to the unprepared. You'll need to use every weapon in your arsenal if you want any hope of surviving an encounter with them."

SUNWING


"These fast and agile flying machines can be found patrolling the skies of the Forbidden West, frequently hovering at great heights to absorb solar energy."

■ Another new machine, the Shell-snapper, resembles a gargantuan snapping turtle—and seems about as friendly.

her story in *Horizon Forbidden West*, due out in February on PlayStation 5 and PlayStation 4. According to game director Mathijs de Jonge, the sequel picks up six months after the end of the first game, as Aloy heads west to investigate "a mysterious and deadly blight."

"In these uncharted lands, she will meet strange new tribes and encounter ever more deadly machines," de Jonge said. "Together with old friends and new companions, she must brave this new frontier to find the answers she needs to save life on Earth."

The shift in location offers *Forbidden West* an opportunity to recapture the magic of the first game's most impactful creation: its stunning setting. "The map of *Horizon Forbidden West* covers an entirely new area," de Jonge explained. "It spans across an area that stretches from Utah all the way to the Pacific in the West, and is inhabited by new types of wildlife, various tribes (some dangerous), and awe-inspiring machines." The new map will offer greater variety in terms of ecosystems, as well. In addition to snowy



areas, deserts, and jungles, Aloy will visit a region that resembles a sandy tropical paradise—set in the ruins of San Francisco, no less.

Better still, these new regions also pave the way for expanded game-play. Aloy will now be able to scale natural rock features without having to rely on predetermined handholds and, in an even bigger shift, she'll be able to swim freely beneath the surface of the water.

"We had verticality in mind when we designed the new free-climbing system that allows players to more

easily scale cliffs and mountains, so naturally this extended to below the surface of rivers, lakes, and seas," de Jonge said. "Just like in real life, you can't always see the beauty of the underwater world until you're actually in it, so it has a sense of mystery and draws in the player to explore."

Diving won't just allow Aloy to navigate between areas or hide from combat, either. Underwater game-play will offer a set of challenges and rewards all its own. "There are amphibious machines to avoid, but there is also treasure to be found

"Just like in real life, you can't always see the beauty of the underwater world until you're actually in it, so it has a sense of mystery and draws in the player to explore."

GAME DIRECTOR MATHIJS DE JONGE



TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

Horizon Zero Dawn was one of the most technically impressive games of the last console generation, so it should excite fans that Guerrilla Games now has access to the added oomph of the PlayStation 5.

"Each generation of consoles brings extra power that lets us add even denser polygons to our character models, so we can create finer details on surfaces like skin, textiles, and the many different materials found in the natural world," explained game director Mathijs de Jonge. Characters will also look better in motion, with more detailed animation rigging and a special emphasis on facial expressions.

"Each generation of consoles brings extra power that lets us add even denser polygons to our character models."

GAME DIRECTOR MATHIJS DE JONGE

And thanks to the speed of the PlayStation 5's solid state drive, *Forbidden West*'s rare loading screens—which you'll only encounter when you have to respawn or fast travel a great distance—will be shockingly quick. "We actually had to change our loading screen hints systems to deal with this, as it loads so fast!" de Jonge said.

Still, if you'll be playing the game on PlayStation 4, don't assume that means you're getting a compromised version of the experience. "We developed and tested the game simultaneously on both consoles to ensure it looks and plays great regardless," de Jonge said, noting that even the last-gen version will feel like an upgrade over its predecessor. "After creating *Horizon Zero Dawn* we knew that we still had some unexplored resources that could push the realism and quality of our character assets forward."

and tools that can allow for a safe escape," de Jonge said. "The tension between beauty and danger is what the world of *Horizon* is all about."

Aloy will get a few new gadgets that make getting around above the surface more exciting, too. The biggest additions here are the Shieldwing, a glider that lets Aloy slow her descent after leaping from heights, and the Pullcaster, a grapple launcher that lets her pull herself up to ledges. "We felt that there was room to make traversal a lot more fun," de Jonge explained.

In conjunction with the new free-climbing ability, Aloy's new gadgets mean there will be more options than ever when it comes to getting around. Platforming puzzles no longer have a single route to success, and the team at Guerrilla expects creative players to discover alternate solutions using the tools it's given them. (We're reminded of the open-ended shrine puzzles in another great 2017 game, *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*.)

The Shieldwing and Pullcaster should also open up more room for

BEST COAST

Horizon Zero Dawn's sprawling open world reimagined real-world landmarks from Colorado, Utah, and Arizona, often in unexpected ways. (The *Frozen Wilds* DLC added in parts of Wyoming and Montana, too.) As the action shifts westward for the sequel, the team at Guerrilla Games has another chance to surprise us with overgrown versions of familiar sights.

"Similar to *Horizon Zero Dawn*, we spent a lot of time studying maps and discussing which sites, geographical features, landmarks, and cities we want to feature in our game," explained game director Mathijs de Jonge. "After settling on the size of the map, we created schematics and ran in-game terrain tests to see how we could bring all those parts of the U.S. together into one coherent game world."

So far, we've caught a glimpse of a handful of exciting locations that will appear in *Forbidden West*. Aloy will journey to a snowy take on Yosemite National Park, as well as San Francisco. Within Frisco, we've spotted the Golden Gate Bridge, the Transamerica Pyramid, and the Palace of Fine Arts (now submerged in crystal-clear ocean waters). But according to de Jonge, players should expect some deeper cuts, too. "Having a mix of famous and less well-known locations in the game helps us ground the story and experience, and provides us with a lot of interesting options to tap into," he said.



■ If Aloy manages to get close to a Clawstrider, she can override its programming and use it as a mount.

expression and experimentation in another side of the game: combat. In gameplay demos, we've seen Aloy use the Pullcaster to grapple up to a high perch, launch herself off, shoot off an arrow from midair, and then touch down safely with the Shieldwing. She'll also be able to use the glider to set up melee attacks from above, or land directly on the back of a mount for a quick getaway if things get too dicey.

Aloy's combat-specific abilities have also seen an overhaul in *Forbidden West*. "We felt it was

important to evolve combat design from the first game and to continue to build on the principles of player freedom and choice during combat in the open world," de Jonge said. In broad strokes, combat will still rely on using ranged attacks with Aloy's trusty bow and arrow and melee attacks with her spear, but the sequel's design places a greater emphasis on connecting the two approaches and encouraging you to switch between them on the fly.

"The skill tree has been overhauled and restructured, featuring many

"We felt it was important to evolve combat design from the first game and to continue to build on the principles of player freedom and choice."

GAME DIRECTOR MATHIJS DE JONGE



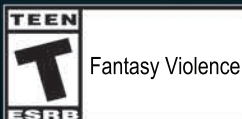
DELUXE EDITION

KENA

BRIDGE OF SPIRITS



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new skills that promote and enhance different playstyles or combinations of those. Our hope is that returning players will feel a sense of familiarity and appreciate the variety and depth we've added to all combat and player progression systems," he added.

Players can also unlock and equip 12 new Valor Surge abilities, powerful boosts to Aloy's attacks that charge up throughout combat

and can come in handy for dispatching tougher foes. One example, the Radial Blast, unleashes a wave of energy that knocks back nearby foes—perfect for when you need a little breathing room in a tough close-quarter fight.

It's already clear that Guerrilla Games has put plenty of thought into how to expand and improve just about every corner of *Horizon Zero*

■ Detailed and stunningly lit underwater environments are one place where the added power of the PS5 should shine.

Dawn when crafting this sequel. But what's equally clear, when de Jonge talks about the game, is that the team hasn't lost sight of the main thing that drew so many players into the first game.

"The world of *Horizon Forbidden West* is incredibly beautiful, and begging to be explored," he said. Based on everything we've seen so far, we'd have to agree. ©

"The world of *Horizon Forbidden West* is incredibly beautiful, and begging to be explored."

GAME DIRECTOR MATHIJS DE JONGE





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SAINTS ROW

NEW PARTNERS IN CRIME

BY MICHAEL GOROFF

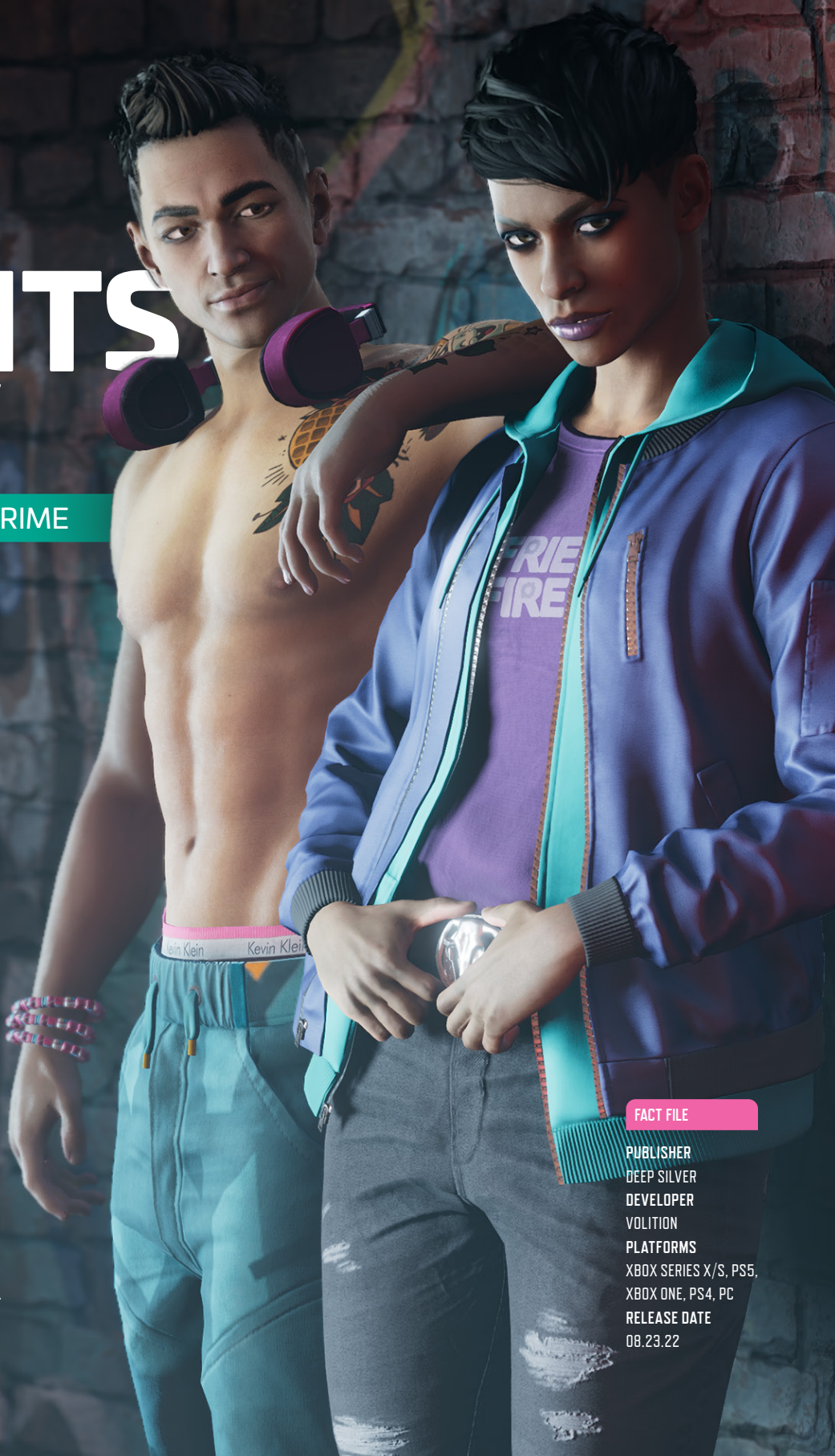
The Third Street Saints have done it all. They've conquered the streets, gone to space, and even fought the devil. But after all that, you have to ask yourself, where do you go from there?

"We told that story and didn't have many options to continue it that we found compelling," Volition senior project manager Robert Gable said. "And trust me, we explored options."

The answer, then, is you go back to basics. The next chapter in the *Saints Row* franchise returns the series to its roots of building a criminal empire—this time from scratch.

Taking place in the fictional desert city of Santo Ileso, players will once again take on the role of The Boss. However, this is a brand-new Boss with their own friends and business partners in Neenah, Eli, and Kevin. Sorry, but Johnny Gat need not apply.

What makes these new characters special is that "[e]ach of the



FACT FILE

PUBLISHER
DEEP SILVER
DEVELOPER
VOLITION
PLATFORMS
XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5,
XBOX ONE, PS4, PC
RELEASE DATE
08.23.22

The next chapter in the *Saints Row* franchise returns the series to its roots of building a criminal empire—this time from scratch.



■ The new Saints draw their inspiration from the original gang, but they're an entirely new and unconnected set of (anti)heroes.



GET YOUR MOTOR RUNNIN'

One of the main focuses when rebooting *Saints Row* was the driving. After all, Santo Ileso is a desert town with a lot of ground to cover between major parts of the city.

"Driving didn't only have to be an effective means of getting around, but weaving in and out of traffic on a busy expressway had to be as much fun as driving off of mesas in the desert," Volition senior project manager Robert Gable told us.

That's why Volition refined mechanics like sideswiping cars and shooting while on top of yours. These refined mechanics, as well as improvements to enemy AI when in a car chase, "will make you feel like you're in the middle of an action movie," Gable said.

Vehicle-based missions will also cover land, sea, and air. "Well, not 'sea' specifically," Gable said, but there is a "large lake in the middle of the city" that he said to watch out for.



“There may even be rewards for spending quality time helping your friends outside of the main campaign.”

VOLITION SENIOR PROJECT MANAGER ROBERT GABLE

friends bring a special set of skills to the team,” Gable told us, “such as Neenah being the best getaway driver in the city or Eli’s sense of how to use legitimate means to build an illegitimate empire.”

These new partners in crime will accompany you on missions, but you can also just call them to hang out when goofing off in the game’s massive open world. “There may even be rewards for spending quality time helping your friends outside of the main campaign,” Gable said.

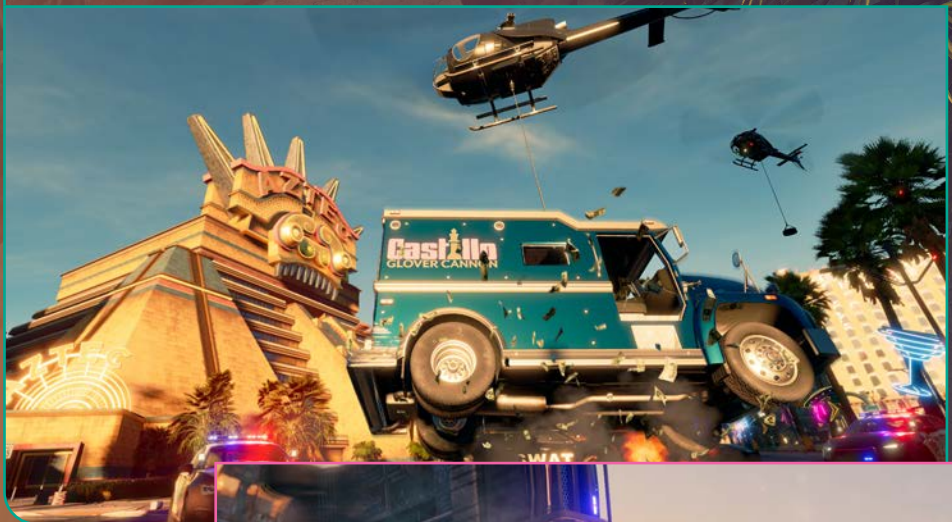
Standing in your way of total domination of Santo Ileso are the city’s three resident gangs: Los Panteros, Marshall Industries, and The Idols. Gable said that the design for each gang “took inspiration from different points in the series’ history.”

The drug-running Los Panteros are “reminiscent of *Saints Row 2*,” while players familiar with *Saints Row: The Third* “may spot some similarities to threats faced in that game” when dealing with Marshall Industries.

With the new *Saints Row*, Volition has looked to the past to chart the series’ future. Unlike previous *Saints Row* titles, however, this one is “not explicitly connected” to Volition’s other series, *Red Faction* and *Agents of Mayhem*. “I promise, this desert city is not secretly on Mars,” Gable said.

Like the rest of this reboot, though, there are still nods to the lifelong fans. “We are Volition and like to get a bit cheeky when making our games,” Gable said. “There are plenty of Easter eggs for the sharp-eyed fans out there to find.”

■ The Southwestern flavor of Santo Ileso gives the city an entirely different vibe from previous *Saints Row* settings.



preview

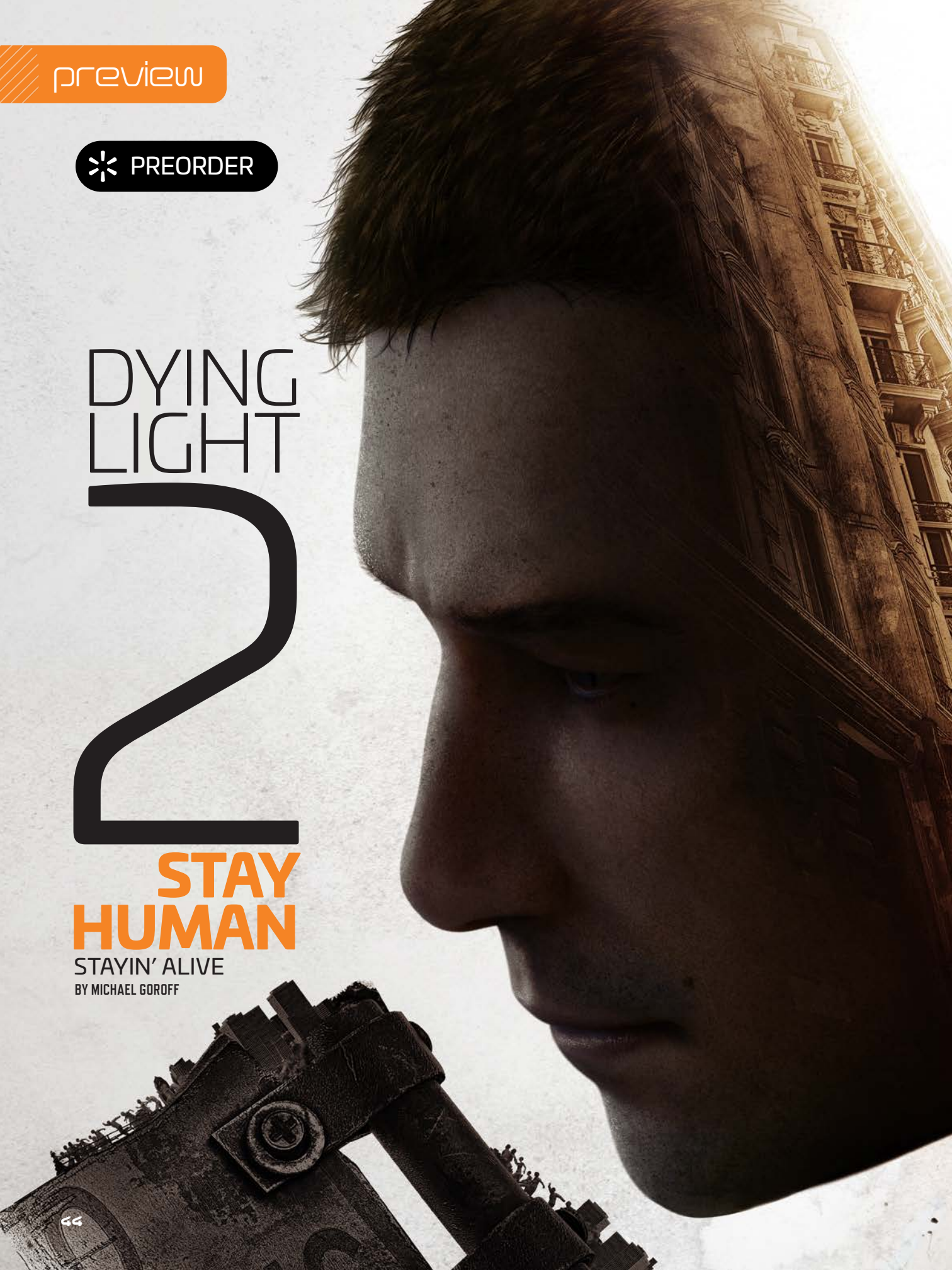
* PREORDER

DYING LIGHT 2

STAY HUMAN

STAYIN' ALIVE

BY MICHAEL GOROFF





Techland made a name for itself with 2011's *Dead Island*, but 2015's *Dying Light* really solidified the studio as the best developer of zombie-based games since Capcom. The dense urban sprawl, the gravity-defying parkour, and the in-your-face combat made *Dying Light* unforgettable. After years of making us wait, Techland is ready to set a new standard for zombie games once again with a sequel, *Dying Light 2 Stay Human*.

Taking place 15 years after the outbreak of the virus, *Dying Light 2* puts players in the sneakers of a survivor named Aiden Caldwell. Aiden travels to The City, the last bastion of humanity in a world that zombies and other monsters have almost completely con-

After years of making us wait, Techland is ready to set a new standard for zombie games once again with a sequel.

FACT FILE

PUBLISHER
TECHLAND
DEVELOPER
TECHLAND
PLATFORMS
XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5,
XBOX ONE, PS4
RELEASE DATE
02.04.22

quered. Aiden didn't just end up in The City by accident, however—he's there to solve a mystery that he's been carrying around his entire life.

Functionally, The City offers a lot of the same gameplay opportunities as *Dying Light*'s Harran. Players will find plenty of buildings to scale, gaps to jump, and obstacles to swing on and slide under. The main difference is its size: The City is around four times bigger than Harran thanks to the increased verticality of the map.

Another way that The City differs from Harran is its inhabitants. In *Dying Light 2*, meeting and working for or against The City's many factions

is what drives the story forward, and there's a lot of variety in the groups you'll encounter. Survivors utilize their ingenuity to create bases of operation all over the city and scavenge for what they need, while the Peacekeepers are former military officers who use brute force to carve out their slices of The City.

Who you align with and the decisions you make throughout the story can have a major impact on what happens to The City. Depending on your actions, entire neighborhoods can become flooded, and structures and landmarks can even come tumbling down.

Players will find plenty of buildings to scale, gaps to jump, and obstacles to swing on and slide under.

Human survivors will present just as many challenges—and interesting decisions—as the undead.





MONSTER MASH

Dying Light 2 Stay Human brings back some fan-favorite infected like the hulking Demolisher and terrifying Volatile, but you'll have to contend with a few new monsters in The City.

SLEEPING BEAUTIES

While they might not appear dangerous at first, don't let Sleeping Beauties catch you slipping. Sleeping Beauties will stay asleep if you crouch and sneak around them. But get too close and you'll wake the horde.

REVENANTS

These skinny-legged infected might not be too dangerous on their own, but the giant spikes on their backs actually emit a viral mist that buffs nearby infected. Take them out first before dealing with the rest.

DROWNED

Even the water isn't safe with the Drowned. These infected are covered in spikes and prefer areas where they can get wet.

BANSHEES

These agile and infected fashionistas will make quick work of you with their giant claws.

Of course, the time of day remains a big factor. During the day, your main foes are other humans like thieves and enemy factions, with your standard packs of zombies about. At night, dangerous monsters, sensitive to the UV light of the sun, come out to rule the rooftops.

Nighttime presents a different kind of opportunity, though: Since the monsters have all come out to play, their underground nests are ripe for the picking. If you're brave enough, you can find some valuable loot while the infected roam the streets. 🕹



* BUY NOW

GAME OF THE MONTH

86
100

RIDERS REPUBLIC

MOUNTAIN MAJESTIES

BY JOSH HARMON

The best open-world games feel like a vacation. *Riders Republic*, to its great credit, feels like a whole bunch of vacations in one. The extreme sports game from Ubisoft Ancey condenses the most memorable sites from six U.S. National Parks (and one ski resort) into a breathtaking playground, turning you loose to race and pull off stunts against a truly remarkable backdrop.

If you've ever spent any time exploring the wilds of America, you're going to love getting lost in the world of *Riders Republic*. Maybe you'll enjoy the towering walls and calming woods of its Yosemite section. Or perhaps you'll prefer the twisting canyons and sandstone cliffs of Zion, or the impossibly large redwoods of Sequoia. No matter what type of nature you

love best, there's so much variety in *Riders Republic*'s map that you'll find no shortage of stunning vistas to suit your tastes. Thanks to a connected approach, that world also feels truly alive, packed with people playing online and the "ghosts" of what other players have done in the past.

Best of all, however, is that the game lets you explore and enjoy its locales in ways you couldn't in real life. Who among us is ever going to actually race a BMX bike down Half Dome, snowboard down the Tetons, or fly inches from the top of a se-

quoia grove in a wingsuit? In addition to real-world sports, *Riders Republic* further sweetens the deal with outlandish toys like rocket-powered skis and jet-engine-powered wingsuits that turn your racer into a miniature plane.

Throw in the ability to switch between any of these options in real-time at the press of a button, and you have a recipe for tons of silly fun. Odds are good you'll get just as much enjoyment out of goofing off between events as from actually completing objectives.

FACT FILE

PUBLISHER

UBISOFT

DEVELOPER

UBISOFT ANCEY

PLATFORMS

XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5,

XBOX ONE, PS4, PC

RELEASE DATE

10.28.2021

The extreme sports game from Ubisoft Ancey condenses the most memorable sites from six U.S. National Parks (and one ski resort) into a breathtaking playground.



Of course, this isn't just a playground. There are hundreds of structured events to take on, as you build your reputation as a racer and athlete in the hopes of qualifying for the Riders Ridge Invitational. But rather than forcing you through a set path, the game employs an open-ended structure. Just about everything you do in the game, including sightseeing, awards stars that help you progress toward that end goal. If there's a sport you don't like, you don't have to play it—there are always plenty of other options.

In fact, there's so much packed into *Riders Republic* that we don't have space to get to everything. There are also competitive online modes, including Mass Races (against upwards of 50 players on the latest consoles) which feel like a cross between a racing game, the slapstick humor of *Fall Guys*, and a battle royale mode. There's faster gear to unlock as you level up, as well as a ton of options for customizing your racer, from licensed clothing to ridiculous outfits.

Ultimately, what makes *Riders Republic* such a great getaway is the sense of freedom it offers: freedom to go where you want and do what you want. Hard to argue with that. [G](#)



1 ON 1

DIEGO RODRIGUEZ

HEAD OF STUDIO, FAIR PLAY LABS

GAME DIRECTOR, NICKELODEON ALL-STAR BRAWL

Crafting a high-intensity fighting game based around characters from the long legacy of children's television network Nickelodeon is simultaneously the most ridiculous and most awesome idea a developer could come up with. In *Nickelodeon All-Star Brawl*, publisher GameMill Entertainment and developers Ludosity and Fair Play Labs have made a lot of dream match-ups finally come true. To learn more about how such an immense and previously unthinkable project was finally developed, we double dared Fair Play Labs' Diego Rodriguez to run through our obstacle course of questions. And, thankfully for Rodriguez and his wardrobe, he didn't give us a single "I don't know."

WGC: Can you give us a brief idea of what players will find when they jump into *Nickelodeon All-Star Brawl*?

Diego Rodriguez: *Nickelodeon All-Star Brawl* is the kind of fighting game where you can finally answer age-old questions like, "Who would win in a fight between Sandy from *SpongeBob SquarePants* and Reptar from *Rugrats*?" or show your childhood friend that Leonardo really is the best Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle, *period*.

WGC: It must be a daunting task to bring so many beloved yet different characters together into a game where they're all on an equal footing.

DR: Yes, it's a challenge and we certainly felt the pressure, but at the same time, it was fun and exciting! These are Nickelodeon characters we're talking about! We grew up watching these cartoons and we love these characters, so we made our best ef-

fort to represent them as best as we could. And, judging from the reception the game has had, we feel things went pretty well.

WGC: How did you find a balance between satisfying both casual players and hardcore fighting game fans in *Nickelodeon All-Star Brawl*'s gameplay?

DR: One of the key elements was giving players lots of options. We have basic moves like light and strong attacks, which are accessible to pretty much any player. But then, if you want to go deeper, you can learn more advanced techniques like air dashes and wavedashing. In addition, the

Ludosity team had previous experience on similar titles, which was key for the development of the game's foundation. They did an amazing job designing the characters' moves.

WGC: For good or bad, some will directly compare the game to Nintendo's *Smash Bros.* series. What are some of the ways that *Nickelodeon All-Star Brawl* stands out as its own experience?

DR: It differs in many ways. We aimed to make the controls a little easier to get into for new players while keeping the full depth of play the competitive scene wants. So, for example, we aimed to make turning much easier. Also, this game is fast, perhaps faster than any other platform fighter out there. Seriously, I feel for the commentators narrating competitive matches for this game!

WGC: For those who might not be as into that competitive aspect of *Nickelodeon All-Star Brawl*, what single-player options does the game feature?

DR: It features an Arcade mode in which players can face off against a lineup of computer-controlled characters and earn rewards like gallery pictures, online profile badges, and songs for the in-game jukebox. And even if you're not interested in the game's competitive aspects, it's still an amazingly fun and wild party game you can enjoy with up to four players locally or online without having to worry about rankings or some obscure pro technique that requires lots of training.

WGC: Crossover games are always a good way to live out some of those "what if" conversations fans love having. What are a few of the face-offs that you think are especially fun to see?

DR: Avatar Aang vs. Avatar Korra is a great one, because in theory they should be pretty much equal, right? What about *SpongeBob* versus literally anyone? And, of course, my personal favorite character, Invader Zim, conquers everyone!

"Nickelodeon All-Star Brawl is the kind of fighting game where you can finally answer age-old questions like, 'Who would win in a fight between Sandy from SpongeBob SquarePants and Reptar from Rugrats?'"



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